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SIPDIS

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
DEPT FOR AF/E - RMEYERS  
DEPT FOR AF/FO, INR/AA, INR/B, AND DRL  
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E - CKOLLMAR  
DEPT FOR DS/DSS/ITA - DROTHSTEIN  
PARIS FOR D'ELIA  
PRETORIA FOR POLCOUNS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [AU](#) [CN](#)  
SUBJECT: COMOROS STABILITY IMPROVING ON TWO ISLANDS

REF: ANTANANARIVO 681 and Previous

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Compared to their predecessors, the newly installed island presidents on both Grande Comore and Moheli appear more conciliatory and more willing to work constructively with the Government of the Union of the Comoros. As such, prospects for greater Union stability - despite the ongoing separatist rebellion by Anjouan's warlord, Mohamed Bacar - may prove to be the most positive outcome of the recent island elections. While we hope the African Union (AU) is successful in bringing Anjouan swiftly back into the fold through a free and fair election, the possibility remains that Bacar may continue to flout the international community. If so, we recommend continuing all USG projects, and supporting all multilateral projects, on both Grande Comore and Moheli. In this way their citizens may be rewarded for their peaceful adherence to democratic norms, rather than punished for Bacar's rebellion. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. (U) Visiting on the occasion of the Comoran July 6 Independence celebrations, Charge met with a wide range of Comoran contacts including Union President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi and the two newly elected island presidents: Mohamed Ali Said in Moheli and Mohamed Abduloihabi in Grande Comore.

¶3. (U) In his Independence Day speech to local and foreign dignitaries July 6, Sambi was at pains to contrast the peaceful and transparent electoral processes that had taken place on schedule June 10 and 24 in Grande Comore and Moheli with the stubborn refusal of Bacar to submit to the will of the people of Anjouan. He promised to make every conceivable effort to reunite the Comoros through peaceful means, but swore to lead the landing party himself if military action became the only remaining option. In this regard, he expressed hope that the AU effort at mediation, then about to begin (Reftel), might bear fruit.

¶4. (SBU) In private July 10, Sambi hewed to the same theme. He stated that he had strained relations with Abdou Soule Elbak and Said Mohamed Fazul, the former presidents of Grande Comore and Moheli respectively. He said the nation's progress would be impeded if the island governments were not working in tandem with the Union government and seemed confident that he could forge a better partnership with Abduloihabi and Ali Said. He suggested that a better balance between the autonomy of separate island institutions and the efficiency of unitary institutions would need to be

negotiated after the crisis on Anjouan has been resolved.

15. (SBU) On Moheli, President Ali Said appeared most concerned by the looting of the official residence and offices by his predecessor, whom he had just beaten soundly (57-43) in the runoff election. Indeed, touring the rooms where air conditioners, furniture, light fixtures, and even light bulbs had been removed, it was not difficult to believe that the state treasury had been left just as empty. Ali Said claimed that he had been "neutral" - neither pro-Sambi nor anti-Sambi - during the election but that he believed he could work effectively with the Union President as long as Moheli is given its proper share of Union resources. He acknowledged that in a nation as poor as the Comoros there was not a great deal to be shared.

16. (SBU) On Grande Comore, Abduloihabi spoke more directly of the need for partnership with the Union. As Sambi's recent Chief of Staff he was closely associated with the Union President and his election victory (55-45) may be read as a vote of confidence in Sambi. Abduloihabi noted that Elbak, in a desperate effort to shore up his electoral support, had hired a large number of unnecessary employees shortly before the election. This effort had failed - Elbak did not even make it into the runoff round - but now Abduloihabi was faced with undoing this wasteful gesture. He intended to seek efficient governing structures and to promote a better work ethic, to include a spirit of cooperation between the island and the Union. In fact, he planned to loan staff to the Union ministries and to accept Union staff on detail to the island ministries - a plan that Sambi warmly endorsed when Charge mentioned this discussion. Abduloihabi said it would be premature to examine changes to the constitution now, but that he would be willing to consider the possibility in the future, agreeing that a system that synchronized the Union/island elections would be more likely to

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provide a unified government, as well as saving funds for more urgent social purposes.

17. (SBU) COMMENT. The tenor of all these discussions suggested the successful island elections on Grande Comore and Moheli are likely to move the nation toward greater stability and unity. Unfortunately the current impasse on Anjouan points in the opposite direction. However, given reports of Bacar's unpopularity, it may be that a free election bringing in a new leadership on Anjouan will cement the positive trend already visible on the other two islands. For this reason it has been troubling to hear reports, particularly from the World Bank and the IMF, that they intend to suspend programs in the Union of the Comoros until the quasi-secession of Anjouan has been resolved. From our perspective all donors should continue working in Grande Comore and Moheli. This will further isolate Bacar and make him even less popular with the citizens of Anjouan, while avoiding the danger of "punishing" the citizens of Grande Comore and Moheli for their free, fair, and peaceful elections. END COMMENT.

18. (SBU) Bio notes:

--Moheli island president Mohamed Ali Said is a wealthy businessman with interests in construction and public works as well as commercial activities. This was his first foray into politics and he claimed to be motivated by the belief that he could do better than his hapless predecessors. He was somewhat taciturn and prone to letting his advisors and Chief of Staff speak on his behalf. This may have been partly because he appears to be more comfortable speaking in Comoran than in French.

--Grand Comore island president Mohamed Abduloihabi, 48, is a lawyer with many years of government service who has overcome societal discrimination as an albino in a conservative society where "The Albino" is his nickname. He resigned as President Sambi's Chief of Staff to run for island president. In previous administrations he has served as interior, foreign, and justice minister. He was relaxed and expansive in the meeting.

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